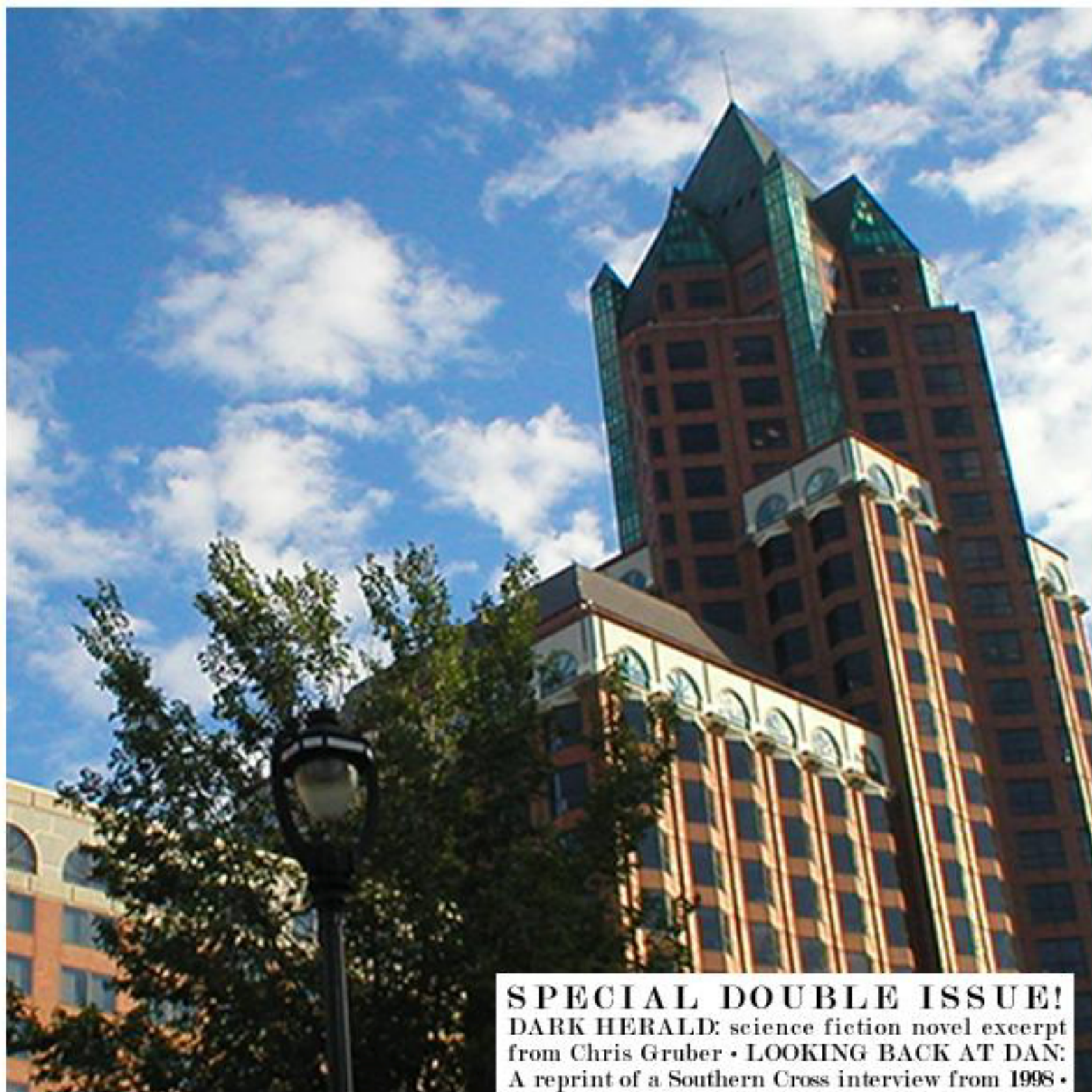


TALOSSA'S PREMIER NEWS-MAGAZINE

QATOR • ITRINS



SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE!

DARK HERALD: science fiction novel excerpt from Chris Gruber • **LOOKING BACK AT DAN:** A reprint of a Southern Cross interview from 1998 • **A MAGNET IS USELESS ALONE** by Marti-Pair Furxhéir • **ALSO:** news, editorial, and more!

VOLUME I, No. 6/7

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2005

editorial

No More Monarchs. Ever.

The sixth issue of **Qator Itrîns** marks a turning point in the history of the Republic's culture – because it is the first issue for which I myself do not take primary responsibility. Quite apart from being editor in chief of this newsmagazine, and Chair of the Constitutional Committee, back in the real world I hold down two paid jobs as well as being a committed political activist and struggling musician. On top of that, I have to be as nice as possible to partner, friends, and self, so as not to turn into the kind of evil, ranting beast that my political enemies seem to think I am already – or put on weight, for that matter. You can understand why I've felt a bit like an avalanche victim recently.

So, I'd like to give my heartfelt thanks to Chrisich Cavêir for his help making sure that QI-6 got onto the virtual newsstands only a few days late. But the fact that this happened brings me onto broader themes of why I feel that our new Republic has every chance for success.

We all know in the Republic that that problem with the old Kingdom was monarchy. To be precise, that one man was the final authority, not only over all processes of government and politics in the nation, but also when it came to language, history, culture... With that kind of power, was it really a surprise that he found himself qualified to comment on who deserved to be a member of the nation – or, for that matter, on what “good” and “evil” were?

But this was not just a problem with one person's paranoia and desire for complete control. The way that the Kingdom evolved, it was *impossible* to replace the monarch. If he had been politically unseated, nothing could have taken away his massive linguistic, cultural and historical authority. Or the fact that our longest-serving and most committed citizens were all his personal friends – at least, those he hasn't alienated, yet.

The problems of this kind of “cultural monarchy” also occurred, despite the best intentions of its founding parents, in the Free Commonwealth of Penguinia. Perhaps because of the lack of a fundamental consensus about who we were and what we were doing, a “second generation” of Penguinian leadership never came to fruition. Those who came after us were frustrated when their plans and schemes came into contact with the founders – who could not be replaced, since we had neglected to build structures strong enough that could survive without our support. From that came the civil strife that split us apart.

In the Republic, thankfully, we seem to be avoiding that. No person or persons “embody” the Republic. Transferral of power from one Dean to another has been carried off almost as easily as a shift in the editorship of our main journal. If, once the Constitution is ratified and we enter the post-revolutionary period, we can make sure that there is truly no monarchy, or oligarchy, in the Republic's culture as well as its governmental structure, then we will surely continue to thrive.■



Miestrâ Schivâ “The Republic's Most Articulate Spokeswhatever”

tent pasat me dûcia als tgemâs pû vastâs da pêrqet sentéu qê ár nouâ República tent totsörtâ da escasença pêr sucçêß.

Noi toct säpent dîn la República qê el problüm cün el Regipäts vell füt la monarc'hâ. Estarê preciat, qê viens vür füt el ec'htiär final, non solamînt övër toct i proceßs del governmäintsch és dels politici dîn la naziun, más ocsâ övër el ghelget, la tgistôriâ, la culturâ... Cün 'n tál pêväre, füt-ça vrâtsmînt 'n surpriçâ qê o se tent xhuxhat solid comentar övër qî deserveva estarê citaxhiên - eda, în aceastâ tgemâ, övër qê füt “bunâ” és “caitivêtz”?

Más acest füt 'n problüm non solamînt övër iens perziun sê paranôia és desireu pêr el contrôl compläts. Come evolveva el Regipäts, ça füt *impouçiväl* remplaçar el monarc'h. Schi o füt overtgruat politicälmînt, nitgil pogñhéva utförar sieu autgoritâ maßivâ ghelgetgeascâ, culturäl és tgistôric. Eda el fäts qê ár citaxhiêns els pû iresoluväis és zedicats füvent toct sieu amici perziunäis - à mhîus, acestilor qê o non tent lor aglhenats, détxâ.

Els problüms dal tál “monarc'hâ culturäl” ocsâ tiennent paßat, zesplitzi las întenziuns pû bunâs de sieu parêmts fundéirs, en el Estát Común Liverat da Penguinia. Salacôr à c'hauçâ dal mancançâ d'iensâ cuñcertâ fundamäintschäl övër qî noi füvent és qê noi façevent, 'n “xheneraziun secund” del duceátx Pengouër non tent vienat txamáis àl ráifâ. Acestilor qî tent vienat ospréi noi els fundéirs zevenevent ancumbrats quând lor plâns venevent în contäcts cün els noschtri - qî non püvent estarê remplaçats, parç qê noi tigñhovent negleptat constructar dels strütürs qî pogñhevent sürvivar sânc ár supört. Da ça tent venescü el stráid citänäl qî noi tent ripat.

Dîn la República, remerceatmînt, noi finxhivälmînt esvitent acest. Aucün perziun eda perziuns “incorpora” la República. L'aßignaziun da pêvarê d'iens Provastouër àl 'n altreu füt executat prescâ sâ fátgilmînt qê schmovar el redactéirmäintsch d'ar xhurnal mágñh. Schi, quând noi ratificarhent la Constituziun és noi entrarhent el pieriôt ospréi-revoluziun, noi pêvárhent sigüar qê ja vrâtsmînt aucün monarc'ha, eda oligarc'ha, dîn la República sê culturâ ocsâ qê strütür da governmäintsch, aglhôrc sigürmînt noi continuarhent tgrivar.■

dal redactéir

Non pû dels Monarc'hs. Txamáis.

L'ißútâ sextâ da **Qator Itrîns**, c'è 'n marqeu sviarsînd dîn la tgistôriâ dal República sê culturâ - parç qê c'è l'ißútâ prümâ pêr qê eu steçéu non sînt primärmînt rêspunçiväl. Ben separatmînt da estarê redactéir-prima d'acest noveschtxhurnäl, és Fosteghlâ dal Comitâ Constituziunäl, zürüc dîn el mundeu vräts eu téu douâ posteux paxhats ocsâ qê estarê 'n activistâ politicäl és 'n musiceän luc'htînd. Ocsâ, eu fost estarê sâ sümpâ qê pouçiväl, pêr qê eu non zevenadréu 'n bestâ sâ mäl és lorentzînd (!!!) qê va enemici politicäis me xhuxhent détxâ. Si pût cumprenca pêrqet téu sentiat dacuört 'n pô come 'n victi d'iensâ saraivâ.

Aglohôrc, vèladréu zonarê va gras-châs cjartaloûr à Chrisich Cavêir pêr sieu aßistançéu pêr sigüar qê QI-6 tent cicat às cabinâs virtuäis da xhurnäis solamînt schpéit aliquînds ziuâs. Más el fäts qê acest

Our Constitution Takes Shape

By the time the next issue of this magazine comes out in April, Talossa should have its new constitution and elected government up and running.

Only minor amendments to the draft produced by the Constitutional Committee have so far been passed by the full Convention. The most important of these were:

- to impose term limits for the Presidency of the Republic
- to require any Presidential pardons to be approved in referendum;
- to increase the size of the Senäts relative to the Chamber of Deputies;
- to remove the requirement for the

Prime Minister (*Seneschäl*) to have been a citizen for a year.

Amendments to tidy up impeachment procedures and the process for ratifying the constitution were also approved. Amendments to remove the length-of-service requirements for the President and Senators were defeated.

However, the face of the document could still be altered radically in response to the people's will. An amendment which would abolish the Senäts altogether and make Parlamînt unicameral is being voted on as we went to press, and looks like getting significant support.

Once these amendments are decided upon, the document as a whole will be checked by the Committee for wording and coherence, and then presented to the people in a "Yes/No" referendum. A two-thirds majority and half the nation voting will be required. Thereupon, the people will elect a President and Chamber of Deputies, with the Senäts following a month later (if it's not abolished in the current round.)

Our original intention was to publish the whole draft Constitution in this issue. Instead, since major parts of Title Two are still up for debate, we print below only Title One. See the next *Qator Itrins* for the final text of Title Two.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TALOSSA

Title One: Points of State

ARTICLE ONE: THE REPUBLIC

1. The name of the State, in the national language, is la Repúblicä Talossán. In English, the name of the State is The Republic of Talossa, citizens of which shall be referred to hereafter as "Talossans".
2. The Republic of Talossa is a democratic, secular and social federal state. All state authority emanates from the people. The population, by means of elections, exercises this authority.
3. A) The territory of the Republic of Talossa consists of the territories of those Provinces of the former Kingdom of Talossa known as Cézembe, Florenciä, Maricopa, and Maritiimi-Maxhestic.

B) The Republic of Talossa hereby also claims as a part of her territory the villages of Shorewood and Whitefish Bay, both formerly of the State of Wisconsin in the United States of America and formerly claimed by the Kingdom of Talossa as well as the entirety of the census tracts of the United States of America which encompass those parts of the City of Milwaukee west of points equidistant between the banks of the Milwaukee River, east of points equidistant between the curbs of United States Interstates 43 and 94, north of points equidistant between the banks of the Menomonee River, all portions of the City of Milwaukee south of the village of Glendale, the village of Glendale itself, the campus of Cardinal Stritch College, and the campus of Marquette University.

C) The Republic of Talossa lays no claim to those provinces of the Kingdom of Talossa known as Atatürk, Mussolini, and Vuode as well as the Territory of Pengöpäts.
4. The National Flag of Talossa is the green and red vertical bicolour with four stars arranged in a diamond in the center of the flag. The green stands for democracy and its virtue; the red for the people and their tenacity. The four stars stand for the four provinces which seceded from the Kingdom of Talossa on 1 June, 2004/xxv/I.



5. The Coat of Arms of Talossa shall exist in two forms: the Lesser State Arms and the Greater State Arms. The Lesser State Arms is an oval shield, long axis vertical, divided vertically in green and red halves, bearing four stars arranged in a diamond in the center. The Greater State Arms consists of the Lesser State Arms with two squirrels as supporters, and as base a scroll bearing the legend "AUDE ALIQUID DIGNUM." Either form of the Coat of Arms of Talossa may be used for official and patriotic purposes.
6. The official motto of the Republic shall be "Aude Aliquid Dignum"; in the national language, "Defisetz Qualse'cosä Denä"; in English, "Dare Something Worthy".
7. The national language shall be the Talossan language. English shall be permissible as a useful second language.
8. The capital of the Republic is the Mitchell Building, Pört Maxhestic Province.
9. The political parties of the Republic participate in the formation of the political spirit of the people. Their internal organization must conform to democratic ethics. They must openly report their finances.
10. Parties that seek to harm or destroy the free democratic basic order or to imperil the survival of the Republic are unconstitutional.

11. The civil officials are servants of the whole community. To all civil officials freedom of political opinion and of association are assured.
12. If a civil official in the exercise of the authority conferred upon him or her by law fails to perform his or her official duty, the accountability is assumed by the province or public corporation in whose service the official is.
13. The general regulations of public international law form part of Republic law. They take priority over the laws of the Republic. Actions undertaken with the aim of disturbing peaceful associations between nations are unconstitutional.
14. This Constitution shall be the supreme law of the Republic. All laws which contradict this Constitution are invalid to the extent of that contradiction.

ARTICLE TWO: CITIZENSHIP

1. As at the ratification of this Constitution, the citizens of the Republic of Talossa shall be the signers of the Declaration of Independence; as well as all those individuals who have been granted citizenship under the jurisdiction of the Provisional Governing Council.
2. Hereinafter, citizenship shall be determined by law.
3. No member of the former royal family of Talossa, the House of Rouergue, shall be admitted as a citizen of the Republic.
4. Throughout this Constitution, the words "Talossan citizen" shall apply only to citizens of the Republic, but shall include any Talossan citizenship prior to the passing of this Constitution.

ARTICLE THREE. THE PROVINCES

Territory and assignment of citizens

1. The founding Provinces of the Republic of Talossa

shall be Cézembre, Florenciã, Maricopa, Maritiimi, and Port Maxhestic.

2. A) Every citizen of the Republic who lives outside the territory of any Province shall be assigned to a Province by act of Parlamînt.
B) The "citizens of a Province" shall include all citizens resident in the territory of that province, as well as any non-resident citizen assigned to that Province.
3. Parlamînt shall assign non-resident citizens to provinces on the basis of their geographical residence. The assignment of citizens to a province shall not be changed without the approval of that province's legislature, if any.
4. Each Province's executive, legislative and judicial powers shall be exercised in accordance with a Provincial constitution, adopted by a majority in referendum of no less than two-thirds of the citizens of that Province.
5. New provinces may be formed by Parlamînt from any territory which may be claimed in future by the Republic under Title One, Article One of this constitution.
6. New provinces may be formed out of the territory of existing provinces by Parlamînt, with the consent of the legislature of those existing Provinces.

The Powers of the Provinces

7. a) The provinces have the power to legislate or take executive decisions on any subject concerning which this Constitution does not bestow exclusive legislative powers on the Republic.
b) If the Republic does not exercise its executive or legislative authority in an area which this Constitution entitles it to do so, the right of authority remains with the provinces. This does not apply in cases where the Republic is granted exclusive authority.
8. Each Province has the exclusive authority over:
 - a) its forms of government;
 - b) its cultural, social and linguistic identity.
9. The Republic has the exclusive authority over:
 - a) Foreign affairs as well as defense;
 - b) Citizenship;
 - c) Freedom of movement, immigration and emigration, and extradition;
 - d) Currency, money, and coinage;
 - e) Postal and telecommunication services;
 - f) The employment of those in Republic organizations;
 - g) Industrial and intellectual property rights;
 - h) Colonial policy.
10. In all other matters, decisions of the Federal Government and Parlamînt shall take precedence over decisions of the Provinces. The High Court shall arbitrate in any dispute between Federal and Provincial governments or legislatures, and its decision shall be final.
11. The officers directly charged with the administration of Republic affairs in any province shall, as a rule, be citizens of that province.

ARTICLE FOUR: DECLARATION OF FREEDOMS AND PROTECTIONS

Introduction

1. The rights granted by this Article shall apply to all citizens of the Republic, and also to all those who register with the Government as prospective citizens according to law.
2. No decision of the Government, or of any Minister or government official, may override these rights. These rights form part of the Constitution of the Republic.
3. Any citizen may seek redress in the Courts against the Government, or any citizen or corporation of the Republic, for violation of these rights.

Equality

4. All persons are equal before the law. This is the right of individual value.
5. No one may be prejudiced or favored due to sex, parentage, race, language, homeland or origin, faith, religious or political opinions, or sexual orientation.

Open Freedoms

6. Everyone has the right to the free progress of his or her person insofar he or she does not violate the rights of others or violate any law within the Republic.
7. Everyone has the right to life and to the sanctity of his or her person. The right of individual value is sacred.

Freedom of Expression

8. Everyone has the right freely to express and to propagate his or her belief by speech, writing, and pictures and freely to inform him or herself from publicly available sources.
9. Freedom of the press and of reporting by electronic communications is guaranteed. There shall be no censorship. Secrecy of all communications is sacred. Restrictions may be ordered only pursuant to a law.

Freedom of Belief

10. Freedoms of faith and of conscience, and freedom of creed, religious or ideological, are sacred. The undisturbed practice of religion is guaranteed.
11. The government shall neither endorse or support any organized religious group, nor make any practice that may reasonably be seen as an endorsement.

Freedom of Association

12. All Talossans have the right to form associations and societies.
13. Associations, the objects or activities of which conflict with the criminal laws or which are directed against the constitutional order or the concept of international relations, are prohibited.
14. The right to form labor associations is guaranteed to everyone and to all trades and professions. Agreements that confine or seek to obstruct this right are null and void.
15. All Talossans have the right to assemble peacefully without prior notification or permission.

Freedom to Voice Opinion

16. Every Talossan has the right to petition the suitable authorities or to their representatives. This right may be exercised by individuals as well as by several persons together.
17. It shall be the right of all citizens to vote on or after their fourteenth birthday.

Inviolability of Privacy and Property

18. The home is sacred. Searches may be ordered only by a judge and may be carried out only in the mode set by law. Otherwise, this sacredness may be encroached upon or limited only to avoid a common danger to individuals.
19. The right to ownership of and the protection of property is guaranteed but implies duties.

Intellectual Property

20. Intellectual labor, the rights of the author, the inventor, the composer, and the artist enjoy the special protection and care of the Republic.
21. The products of Talossan scholarship, art, and technical science shall also be recognized and protected abroad through international agreement.

Application of Rights

22. Insofar as under this Constitution a basic right may be restricted by or only pursuant to a law, the law must apply generally and not solely to an individual case. Furthermore, the law must name the basic right, indicating the article.
23. In no case may a basic right be infringed upon in its essential content.
24. The basic rights apply also to corporations established under Talossan public law to the extent that the nature of such rights permits.

Restrictions

25. The freedom of the individual may be restricted only in accord with the formal law and only with appropriate regard to the law.
26. Any person charged with an offense must be brought before a judge the day following the charge. From there, the detainee shall be informed of the reasons for the charge, and be given an opportunity to raise objection.

Right to Fair Hearing

27. In the courts everyone is entitled to a hearing in accordance with the law.
28. An act can be punished only if it was a punishable offense by law prior to the act.
29. No one may be punished for the same act more than once in pursuance of general penal legislation.
30. Bills of attainder are illegal. A bill of attainder is a legislative act which inflicts punishment without judicial trial and includes any legislative act which takes away the rights of a particular named or easily ascertainable person or group of persons without due process before the Courts.

Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom

A magnet is useless alone. It is the combination of a magnet and of either a magnetic surface or another magnet that creates the magic.

Citizens of a micronations are like magnets. A single citizen posting on a forum isn't a micronation. It is the interaction between several citizens that creates the nation.

We can clearly see it on Wittenberg. There can be a few days without any activity, and suddenly a new thread will spark interest, prompting citizens that have been inactive for several days or even weeks to jump back into action.

The opposite is also true. After a holiday or any period where there is little activity, threads are becoming old and forgotten. Activity is low and if it continues, it risks to generate a period of general apathy.

But that only concerns quantity. Quality and diversity are also two important factors. During the last US election, the Halloween crisis or any other period where the debate is polarized around a single theme, individuals not concerned by the theme will fade away, uninterested by the current discussions, despite the activity being at peak.

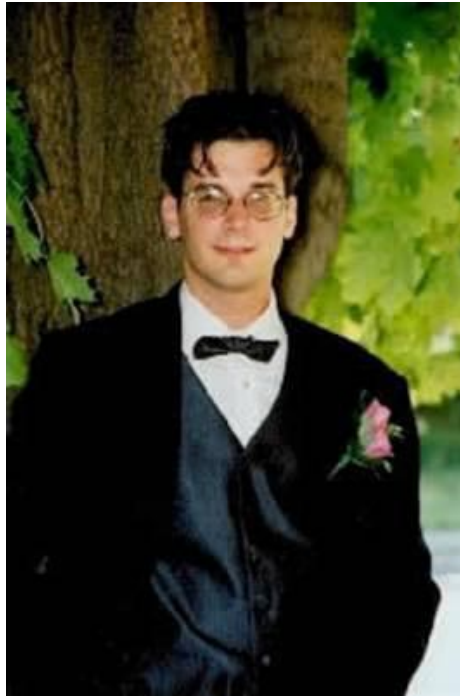
To complicate the matter, during these period of great "mono" activity, a single new thread might spark unnoticed between two giants that would otherwise interest several temporarily silent citizens, frustrating the poster.

In these periods, some interesting threads for the majority of citizens might scroll away simply because new threads are added between two duelling members.

To partly solve this problem, we have created several forums. This allows them to be specialized and avoid the day to day activity of Wittenberg, keeping threads on the first page for days, weeks, months.

This can facilitate long-term discussions, as both the Mitchell forum and the Constitutional convention have proven successfully.

But it has failed miserably for the Database Design forum, and isn't a major success for



MARTI-PÁIR FURXHÉIR shares his ideas on how to keep discussion flourishing in the Republic's online forums.

the language forum either, most likely because most users do not visit these areas, assuming that they will not find interesting subjects.

Even the Mitchell forum needs a little push, reminders on Wittenberg to visit it when a vote takes place.

"Mono" activity also has another side effect, which even plural subjects matters cannot really erase. Most of the activity on a forum is composed of replies to existing messages, with generally only a few posters creating new threads.

As such, forums tend to gravitate around a few favourites subject matters, giving a long term theme which may push certain members aside.

This clearly occurred during the Halloween crisis and the following months. Several citizens that were previously active slipped into the shadows, avoiding the fights. Some returned fully after June 1st, but many aren't as active as before, having possibly replaced their Talossan time with other occupations. Similarly, "mono" activity will also attract only a certain kind of people, those interested in the subject at hand. It will also tend to

attract single-dimension individual, people only interested in one subject such as politics or power plays. These people will also tend to fade away faster when the subject is changed, with their primary interest lost.

Plural subjects matters on the other hand, will attract a wider range of people, with a wider range of interests, who can connect to the nation on multiple levels. These citizens are easy to recognize : they try participate in a variety of activities or at least, talk about them. They form long term friendships with other citizens and take the time to establish bonds with others.

I believe that the periods of great immigration in both the Kingdom and the new Republic have occurred mostly in these now rare windows of wide range of activities.

This is equation is not complex to understand : the more we talk about something, the more interactions we have on a subject, and the more likely we will attract people interested in those subjects.

On a different light, there as been a debate in the past on whether we should talk about the Kingdom of Talossa, or totally ignore it's actions. As long as we were talking about the Kingdom publicly, we were not focusing on the love of our country, but rather on the hate of another.

This could only attract hateful discussions and negative people. Since we stopped and focused more on what was happening inside the Republic, we have seen a wave of new interesting friends and prospectives, and as long as we will focus on our own nation building, I predict this wave will continue.

But we need to continue to diversify our talks. We need to keep opening up to other subjects. We need, like in the good old days when I first joined Talossa, clubs like the Science-Fiction and Whiskey club. We needs many cultural endeavours to help each citizen, prospective, friend and even a first time visitor of the Republic, to find his or her own place.

Yes, we could even attract more female citizens! The Republic has four female

continued on page 12

DARK HERALD

Qator Itrins is pleased to print the first two chapters of a new science fiction novel by Chris Gruber.

Part 1: Dark Star

1

*He is the messenger of the First Cause.
May his words be forever preserved.
The First Cause shall reveal itself when
we are ready. When this occurs, then
all is revealed. His people shall be free.*

— The Cúidlath

Brigadier Dobe Feron, the commander of Base Ea, sat back in his seat at the console. He was expecting a communication from Colonel Lucan before he decided to land his ship. The QMS Sarton crew was generally known for following directives in the Book, but this seemed a little irregular, as if they were running from something, relieved to be home. The patrol near the Iron Halo that the Sarton was a part of found something, to be sure, since the colonel sent a missive via telereX1 mentioning some sort of colony on one of the asteroids.

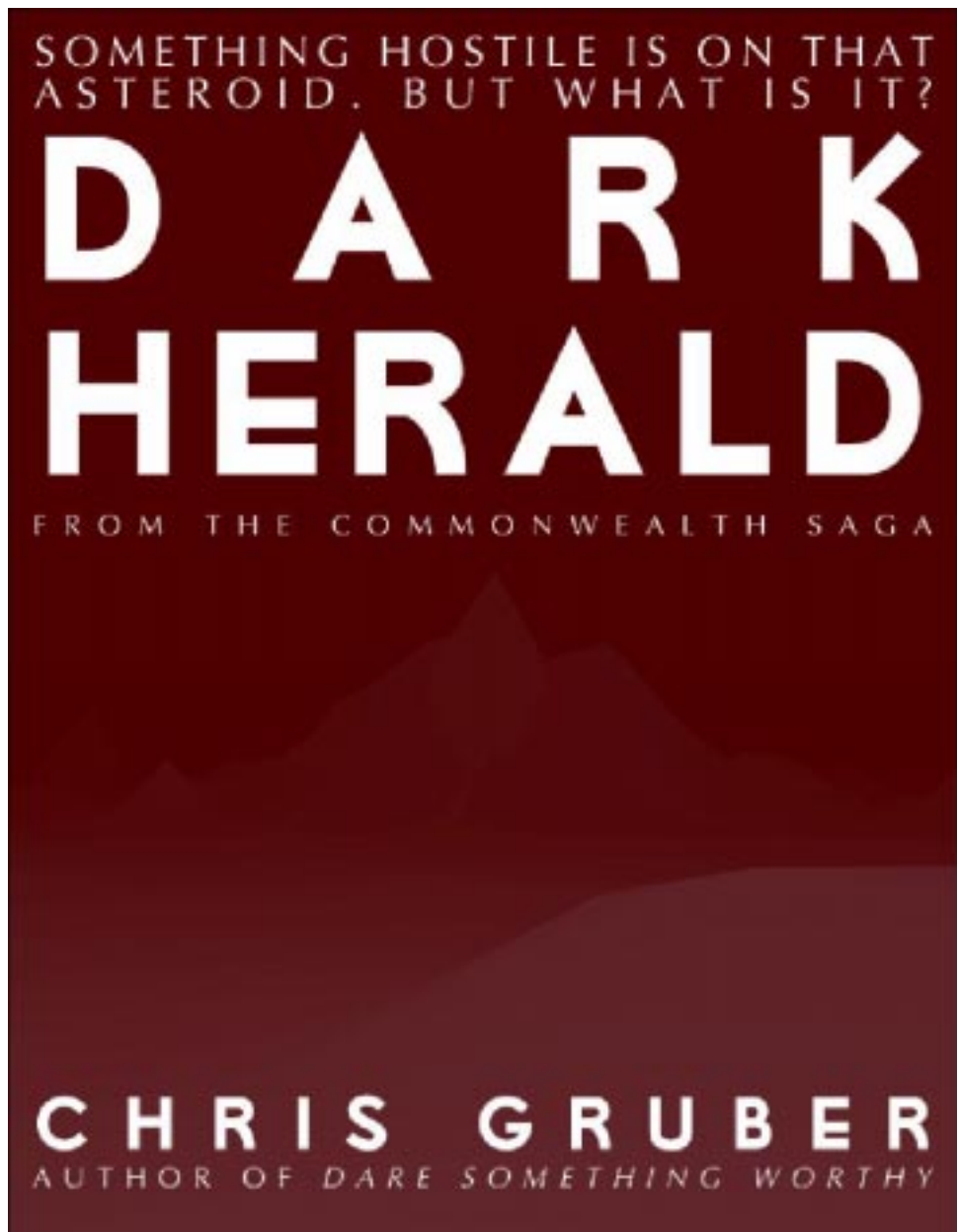
“Jat2,” he said as the ship came into range, “ten to one the colonel’s got a hell of story.”

“Yeah. He almost never fails to call ahead.” Major Jat Molna served as the brigadier’s second-in-command. He was engaged in a review of earlier patrol documents, mostly routine stuff. “Nobody else has mentioned anything out there.”

“The Cefon? The Iopa?”

“Nobody. Looks like same-old same-old out there. Quiet.” Jat was blank in expression, almost to the point of being bored.

“Hmph,” grunted Brigadier Feron.



“Maybe there’s something to that intuition of his.” Then he saw the speck.

“Here she comes.”

The Sarton crept onto the view-screen, first as a little white dot and slowly emerged on the deck with its familiar rugged form, gradually settling in the landing bay.

Jat tapped the pubbad3 and spoke, announcing: “All teams to recovery. All teams to recovery, Sarton.”

A handful of uniformed lackeys sped on foot toward the cooling spacecraft, which sat silently on the deck. One lance corporal shouted cleanup and recovery orders to the others, completing a post-flight ritual necessary for the ship’s maintenance. The door shifted, its rotors a cacophony off the walls of the reverberating space dock. The hatch dropped from underneath its weathered frame.

ficziun nouâ

Colonel Ander Lucan was a large man in both stature and attitude. He made his way down the hatch, which served as a ramp leading into and out of the Sarton. The ship itself was about as large as a small house, with a swept look about it, and a forward section with collector-style feelers on the front. It was beaten and dented, the result of multiple missions in space, pounded by debris over the years. The Sarton, as sturdy as she was, had seen better days.

Lucan muttered under his breath when he saw the recovery team. These jokers always impeded his way to the rest he looked forward to at the end of every patrol, every mission. He was worn, and tired, and damn well done with these grease-monkeys with an abundant amount of zeal. This time, he decided, he would step past them, acting as if he couldn't hear them. If anyone asks, he thought, I'll tell them my hearing was hurt by the engine work I did out there. He laughed. To hell with 'em. I don't need any excuse.

"Colonel Lucan," one started to address him, "we—" but he was cut short when he saw that Lucan didn't turn to listen. Maybe I forgot to salute him, the private thought, so he gave a belated and feeble salute, in hopes that the colonel would finally speak to him. No dice. The colonel kept walking, his hard boots tap-tap-tapping along with his whistling. Maybe he didn't hear me. "Colonel? Colonel Lucan?"

Lucan kept walking until he reached the command center, where Brigadier Feron was most likely at, he figured. He tapped the door. When it shifted open, loud servos and all, Feron was standing right there.

"Ah, Lucan." The brigadier felt comfortable with Colonel Lucan. He'd flown a few missions with him years ago and grew rather fond of the brash young soldier. Lucan did not feel the same affection, but treated the brigadier with taut, disciplined respect.

"Sir."

"How goes it?"

"Well, sir," he cleared his throat,

"we're not sure. We found something there."

"So what did you see, exactly?"

"Well, sir, it's hard to describe."

"Do your best."

"It's about... the size of a small moon. And, it seemed to be running on its own power. We haven't been able to determine if it was a craft or some sort of phenomenon. But it definitely looked like it could possibly pose a threat."

"You don't suppose..." Feron waved his hands, suggesting a large, anti-planetary weapon. Possibly aimed at Ophari4 worlds like Ea5.

"I'm just telling you that my patrol got scared. And we don't get scared."

"I understand." Feron sighed and stared at his hand for a second, deep in thought. "My question to you, Colonel," he finally said, "is: what would happen if we were to go back with a full complement and investigate, possibly land some Armor Guard on that craft, or whatever it is?" Feron stared into Lucan's eyes, intent, serious. "Would you be willing to take that risk?"

Lucan took little time in responding. "I think, yes, if absolutely necessary, and of course, if I was ordered to." He smiled slightly, almost daring the brigadier to give him an unchallengeable order to investigate. Lucan thrived on dangerous thrills, especially those few that scared him. "Something has to be done. We can't ignore this."

"We can't take the chance that it would be a threat."

"Right, sir."

"Well, then, you know what I need you to do."

"Yes, sir. I do."

"Assemble the Phoenix Unit. Get to work."

2

Ere Breisc is what they've taken to calling themselves.

new fiction

— Commonwealth Report
on the Medi Ar6 Fringe Group

"Ahem."

Chief Sergeant Sirge Nexsyn cleared his throat, standing on the deck of the QMS Sarton. The small, nimble team known as the Phoenix Unit was sitting around, geared up and waiting for the landing on the strange rock that the Military Defense Force dubbed the Broga. The Phoenix Unit was the most elite unit in the special forces division called the Special Armor Service.7

"Ahem," Nexsyn reasserted. He was second-in-command of the unit, right behind Colonel Lucan (who, for some reason, stayed on with the Phoenix Unit long after his commission), and was trying to shut up the chatter amongst the other three.

"Colonel Lucan's going to give us the lowdown," he finally said, hushing the group. "He's gonna make sure you're all ready, all prepared, all-knowing, so that when you get in there, it's nothing but Death and Destruction for any and all enemies. Is that understood?"

The guys feebly offered: "Yes, sir."

"I SAID: IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?"

"Yes, sir!" Message received, Chief.

"Alright! That sounds good. Okay, here's the arrangement for patrol: Ash!"

Sergeant Oz Ash spoke up. "Yes, sir." Ash was the biggest of the group, nearly six and a half feet tall. He had started with the Armor Guard two years earlier.

"You got point. Now, I am going to be on your left side. Mierran?"

"Yes, sir?" Kal Mierran, one of the two Hasty Twins, had been in the Armor Guard for four years now, since 6353.

"Yeah, you're on the right side."

"Yes, sir!"

"Meanwhile, on the rear, it's gonna be Arleas on the left..."

new fiction

“Yes, sir,” said Tek Arleas, the other Hasty Twin. They weren’t twins, per se, but were best friends and were smaller than your average Armor Guard. But they were good. They were called Hasty for their tag-team style rush on various outposts. It was quicker than the Colonel would have liked, but it almost always worked. They eventually nicknamed the maneuver the Hasty Blitz.

“...and Colonel Lucan will be on the right in the back.” Nexsyn took a deep breath; he hated this part: the disclaimer. “If anyone falls behind, it is up to each and every one of us to Maintain or Retrieve.” Maintain or Retrieve was standard doctrine in the SAS. “Is that understood?”

“YES, SIR.” The group wasn’t the Phoenix Unit because any renegade ways; they were the ideal for the entire Special Armor Service. They took the MoR doctrine to heart. It was like a sidecar secular religion. The bond they felt for each other wasn’t superficial or contrived. They understood that they depended upon each other to survive. Nothing can break the will, structure, or unity of the team, is what it said on the small plaque near the doorway of the Sarton. They always tapped the plaque on the way out. No team member is to be left behind.

“Alright, get your helmets on, men.”

The team collectively put their helmets on their heads. The helmets served as protection against harsher elements, provided a link to their suit’s safety and environmental systems, and even provided a decent targeting system in the visor. Of course, all communication would be through radio relay, so they’d each sound nice and crackly to each other. But it kept their heads on.

The clicking of helmets into place echoed, and the subtle hummm of each enviro-sys engaging filled the room. They were prepared.

Colonel Lucan, whose headgear was already in place, crackled in on the

relay. “Thank you very much, Chief.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Alright. We’re calling this asteroid or craft Broga. I want you all to do as you are told. We’ll be landing in a few seconds. Let me—all right—okay, get ready! Lock and load, boys!”

Ash whispered, for luck: “Let’s go.”

The Sarton drifted slowly down, with a vertical landing, so that the landing jets would make a clear area, marking their target. The engines’ hard whine slowed to a heave until the jets gave out. Its rugged husk shook as the hatch opened and the five commandoes strode out, machine rifles in hand.

“Alright, everybody out!” The team piled out in front of the craft, lining up. “Get into formation!” The group assumed its patrol form, just as Nexsyn had described when they were on board.

The surface of the rock was sandy, pebbly. The atmosphere (This moonlet has an atmosphere? thought Ash) made it feel like a sandstorm, like a perpetual night tinted deep red. Even with their helmet lights on, the crew could only see a couple hundred feet ahead of them. There was a small wind, maybe a few miles per hour, which whipped slightly over their enviro-sys suits. The atmosphere of this thing was intimidating, stifling their sights, adding an additional layer of uncertainty. It was one thing that they had no idea what to expect in the distance, but it was another that they most likely couldn’t see anything until it was too late.

We’re professionals, Nexsyn told himself, trying to ease his nerves. We’re the best in the business. That’s why they pay us. That’s why we’re here. Because no-one else in the entire system can be trusted to handle this.

Whatever the hell it is.

The gravel surface crunched under their boots as they adjusted themselves into proper position,

ficziun nouâ

double-checking their rifles. Mierran whistled a little, like he always did, and Arleas fidgeted with his helmet. He hated having to wear a head-can.

“Is this atmosphere safe?” he asked, trying to get permission to ditch the unbearable helmet.

“No!” shouted Nexsyn. “Keep it on, damn it. And don’t ask again later.”

“We need a briefing, sir,” said Mierran, changing the subject.

“Alright,” offered Lucan, “this is it how it stands: this is the Broga. We need to find out exactly what the hell it is. We also need to search and make sure that if there are any enemy on this rock, we are to maintain the peace.” The men grunted concurrence. “If we are attacked, we will defend ourselves. However, we are not here to start any fights. We will finish any that come our way. Also, if we can, we are to take back to base any and all samples.” He rose up. “I hope everyone can do their job and do it better than they ever have before. You have my confidence. This is where the Phoenix Unit gets its stripes.”

“Let’s MOVE,” said Nexsyn. “Head to that hill.” He indicated the hill to their relative northwest. It was barely visible through the reddish winds, and no-one was really sure it was a hill. It appeared to be one, a dark red bulge against the horizon that they assumed was a rising of the terrain. But calling it a hill was as good as a guess.

“Hey, Mierran,” said Arleas. “You ever see anything like this before?”

“Not in my lifetime, no.”

“It’s awfully hazy out here.”

“Reminds me of pictures of the worlds before terraforming.” The Broga’s atmosphere and terrain chaos resembled that of the various planets and moons back then. “I’ve only seen pictures and a few vid films, but...” Arleas nodded.

“It’s got me worried, though.”

“What are you worried about?”

Ash spoke up. “There’s nothing to

worry about.” He was tired of the Hasty Twins’ incessant chatter. “You guys just get worried about the strangest little things...” The Twins voiced some reluctant agreement. Ash smiled, and turned to look around when he spotted something tiny in the distance. Something yellow or white. Something brilliant. A light. To their left. “Wait – did you guys see that light?”

“Where?” asked Lucan.

“To the west.”

They all stood quietly for a second, staring westward. There was nothing there but whistling wind.

“I don’t see a damn thing, Ash,” groused Nexsyn. “What am I looking for?”

Just then the light reappeared, a second-long blink of yellowish white, sharp through the red haze.

“There! Did you see that?” said Ash.

The group muttered in excitement. A few What the hells and a couple of Where’s it coming from.

“What do you think, Colonel?” asked Nexsyn, now genuinely curious.

“We’d better investigate. I have a feeling we’ll find some answers in that direction. It’s not a natural light; it’s irregular. Watch.” The team kept their eyes on the same area for a little while longer and saw that, indeed, the light coming from the west did come back on and go out at least twice in two seconds. “Alright. Heading west!”

The three younger men, Ash, Arleas, and Mierran, began to feel a little ill at east.

“What if it’s some sort of military installation?” Ash asked. “Maybe there’s an army waiting for us. What’s the plan then?”

Nexsyn, ever the impatient soldier, asked “What kind of army?”

“I don’t know. Like... like the Medi Ar or something.”

The team laughed this suggestion off.

“Aw, the Medi Ar ain’t going to be around here; that’s crazy,” said Mierran. “This is the Iron Halo. Medi



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Chris Gruber, in addition to being the author of the Commonwealth Saga and several other books (including the definitive early history of the Republic of Talossa, Dare Something Worthy), is a father, fiancé, former radio newscaster, and attendee of the Democratic National Convention. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, and happily owns a Macintosh.*

Ar ain’t going to set up camp on a bloody asteroid.”

“Aw, shut up, Mierran. It’s completely possible. The way the Medi Ar work is nomadic anyway. Why not have a few outposts in the middle of the Ophari territories?”

“Oh, it’s not. You’re being paranoid.”

“I’m being cautious, damn it.”

“Listen, all of you,” said Lucan, not succeeding in getting anyone’s attention in the noise of the argument. “Keep your eyes peeled, because you never know —”

Gunshot.

Then yelling. Shuffling. Pushing. Panicked searching of the horizon. Then a body hit the gravel hard.

The Colonel lay on the ground, his suit torn open with the impact of the rifle shot that hit him. The Phoenix Unit was in full panic mode, with Nexsyn

trying to assess the situation. The only thing anyone could figure was that the shot came from the same place as the weird light.

Colonel Ander Lucan was dead before he hit the ground.

FOOTNOTES

1 Interspace communication system: tele-receiver was shortened in this book to telerec.

2 Pronounced “yacht.”

3 The public address system.

4 The Ophari were one of the two biggest religions, the other being the Medi Ar. Less militant than the Medi Ar, the Ophari were still pretty crusader-like in their military missions. At least 50% of the solar system considered themselves Ophari.

5 The home-world of the Ophari and the Commonwealth itself.

6 The Medi Ar were one of the three major religions of the Commonwealth. A few fundamentalist sects had broken loose and taken up military actions of their own during the wars of the last millennia or so. The typical reaction was to assume the Medi Ar were up to no good.

7 Nicknamed the Armor Guards.

DAN WARDLOW SPEAKS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dan C. Wardlow was appointed Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Talossa in January 1998. Faced with the King continually undermining his efforts to reach a friendly peace settlement with the secessionist Free Commonwealth of Penguinia, he split from the then Royal-controlled Progressive Conservatives to found the Peace and Freedom Party of Talossa (PFPT). On 15th March 1998, despairing of the possibility of reforming the Kingdom, he quit Talossa. Four days later he gave the following interview to the Penguinian newspaper *The Southern Cross*.

Until Chris Gruber fell afoul of the King, Dan Wardlow was the most consistently vilified and slandered Prime Minister in Talossan history. *Qator Itrins* is pleased to reprint this interview, as part of our ongoing project to rectify the falsification of Talossan history. The opinions expressed in this article were those of Mr Wardlow in 1998 and may or may not bear any relation to reality.

SC: Did the vehemence of Ben Madison's aggressive smear campaign against you and your party surprise you? If so, why, considering the evidence of similar campaigns in every Talossan election on record? If not, why were you not more prepared for it, considering that you were being advised by several veterans of previous campaigns?

DW: Yes, the strident tone and the level of intensity really did surprise me. I always thought of myself as a student of Talossan history, and I thought it might, just *might* be possible to run a campaign focused on issues rather than personalities. While I was accused of campaigning on personal differences by Ben and the PC party, it was really the other way around. I had legitimate differences with Ben on the nature of Talossan democracy, and I really wished we could have discussed that publicly in the campaign. Ben and the PC leadership immediately turned it into a personal attack on Ben ... which it never was. It was a challenge to Ben to live up to the ideal democracy that he espouses publicly. In retrospect, I now understand that I had dared to say "the King has no clothes" which in Talossa, one must never do! You cannot challenge his behavior (control of all aspects of Talossan life) by questioning his words (Talossa as a free democracy). That's the lesson for history in my abortive campaign.

SC: In the lead-up to the campaign, you made a number of tactical decisions that surprised some outside observers, such as - not sacking the flagrantly obstructionist PC members in your cabinet immediately; not attempting to run for the PC candidacy and thus isolate the obstructionists from their own party; not signing the Penguinian Peace Treaty into law at your first opportunity, which acting PM Sauls has done; delaying the



Dan Wardlow in 1998

announcement of your new party, and thus allowing Ben to make the running in public debate with accusations of "treachery" and "conspiracy"; and refusing to fight fire with fire by making an election issue out of PC negative tactics, or the silly antics of their candidate Chris Gruber. Would you have done anything differently, if you had the chance over again?

DW: Possibly. Believe it or not, I tried to reconcile things within the PC party. Had we been able to craft an honest campaign strategy, I would have preferred to remain in the PC! But it quickly became apparent to me that the PC leadership (basically Ben and Ián Metáirã) wanted me out of the party because I had dared to question Ben's internal contradictions. It quickly became obvious that the party leaders were lining up behind Ben, in Metáirã's case to preserve his power structure and status in Talossa. There really wasn't an option for me other than leaving the PC. Yes, I could have sacked the entire cabinet. But the entire cabinet was not the problem, and in any event, to

presumptively have installed an unelected government just prior to elections would have been most un-democratic, and hypocritical of me.

Also, the PFPT had in its earliest discussions determined that it wanted to stick to the issues, and leave the negative campaigning to the PC. I would not consider stooping to the level of the tactics played out by Ben and Ián Metáirã. In fact, when I found out that Ben had been spreading half-truths and selectively edited private email which I had sent him, I sent him another email message chastising him for his dirty politics and vowing never to use those tactics against him. I easily *could* have done so. As a PC insider (however briefly), I had received enough ugly back-stabbing mail from party loyalists about each other, including mail from Ben and Ián Metáirã commenting on each other! But those were *private* and in my mind privileged communications, and I could not imagine using those for political gain. It's unseemly, undignified. Call me naive for that perspective.

SC: How would you react to suggestions that, by responding to Ben's pressure by quitting, you are not only handing a person you clearly feel deserves beating a better chance at victory, but letting down the other members of your party by depriving them of your possibly crucial vote? Do you accept that you have dealt the PFPT, and thus Talossan democracy, a mammoth blow by quitting?

DW: I didn't decide to quit until I read a very personal and insightful message posted on the discussion group Wittenberg by Talossan Ián Anglatzarã. In the message, he commented that we were nothing but actors playing out a very old script, one which had been enacted many times before. I went back and read

my Talossan history carefully, trying to read between the lines that Ben has written, and I realized that Ián had succinctly captured my despair. At that point, I couldn't continue to participate in a sham. It was so painfully obvious to me that I had been deceived by listening to Ben's platitudes about Talossan democracy as I was becoming a citizen. It was suddenly revealed to me that Talossan politics are nothing more than ritual. It is pre-ordained that the PC (or whatever party is controlled by Ben) must win the elections. The "opposition" must never be allowed to have any significant say in the country. This is the lesson of Talossan history. And those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. I'm not dumb.

SC: As an out-and-proud gay man, do you believe there to have been a homophobic undercurrent to the PC's campaign against you? On what evidence?

DW: Well, as an out gay man, you "get used" to some residual level of homophobia in your life. You learn not to internalize it (and if you don't learn that, well, you're miserable). It would be hard for me to say there was overt homophobia coming from the PC in this election, although since leaving Talossa a few stray emails have come my way indicating some petty and immature homophobic comments leveled at me by the PC's PM candidate. So I wouldn't say there was no homophobia coming from the PC, but it wasn't anything that really "got to" me. Oddly enough, Ben's co-conspirator Ián Metáirâ had warned me of Ben's own homophobia on my acceptance as a citizen. His advice to me then was never to make an issue of my sexual orientation, or I would see Ben use that against me as Ben had little "tolerance" for gay men. Ironical, given that this advice came to me from an "out" gay man!

SC: What is your stance on "pocket votes"? Do you accept the proposition that there is a constituency of Talossan citizens, mainly those without Internet access, who take no part or indeed interest in Talossan politics, but who routinely cast a PC vote just on Ben Madison's say-so? If so, do you think this is necessarily a bad thing? Why?

DW: Yes, I believe there are "pocket



A PFPT election ad

votes" cast by Talossans who, while citizens, have little or no daily contact with the Kingdom. Three in particular (Ben's father and sister, and his friend Jean Williams) by Ben's own candid admission to me were really out of touch and knew little of what was going on. He told me this in the context of my conducting the PM's poll on my becoming Prime Minister, telling me not to expect any kind of response from them because they had no idea what was happening in Talossa. There is a foul stink to this. Among Ben's many hats, he is Deputy Secretary of State, and thus an elections official. It is my understanding that Ben himself "delivers" the votes from these three individuals to the SoS for compilation. This conflict of interest hardly holds Ben above suspicion. The existence of suspicion about these voters taints the electoral process with prospective voter fraud. It is inconsistent with democratic values.

SC: Do you still believe the Peace and Freedom Party has a chance of winning power in the current election, even with pocket votes and the lack of a secret ballot? If so, do you think they will be able to accomplish much in the face of a hostile Upper House and King?

DW: No. As I mentioned before, this election is a scene being replayed from Talossan history. Even if the PFPT could garner the votes to carry the Cosa, they could not "win." They would be blocked at every opportunity by the Senats, and by the Uppermost Cort. Furthermore, those Talossans who voted PFPT would be harangued as traitors by Ben at every opportunity. No party can win and be effective unless it is Ben's party, by definition.

SC: Do you even care?

DW: At this point, no, I don't care. I met some very fine folks through Talossa, and

I hope I'll be able to maintain those few friendships on levels which don't involve Talossa. But immediately after quitting Talossa, I deleted all my Talossa-related browser bookmarks, all my Talossan email addresses and phone directory, all my own Talossan web site materials, and any correspondence I had. I then took all printed Talossan materials out to the back yard and had a nice ritual cleansing bonfire. Since then, I've been quite happily engaged in other pursuits. You know, sometimes you pursue a hobby only to find out it's not at all what you thought it would be. Talossa was one such pursuit. I don't look back.

SC: How do you react to the following quote from a former PFPT member? "[Dan] does seem to be quitting because he can't get his way (or feels he can't) despite the fact that most Talossans apparently agree with and support him. Is that any better than Ben's trying to get his own way all the time? I don't know. Yes, Ben's political tactics may be sleazy, but how could so many people have remained in Talossa for so long if Ben was truly, on a basic, personal level, such a scumbag?"

DW: Well, I think the answer to that is obvious. It depends on your tolerance for Ben's intervention and manipulation. I couldn't stand his hypocrisy. I never wanted "power" in Talossa. My reasons for becoming a Talossan were cultural, and I accepted the PM position reluctantly. Ironically, Ben and Ián Metáirâ convinced me to take the position in January based on my ability to steer the PC back to the centrist political grounds in the kingdom prior to the upcoming (now current) elections. The first thing I did was to conduct a survey of all Talossans to discover that middle path. I'm a marketing guy, and I believe in making decisions based on good information. Eventually, 28 Talossans responded to the survey, from virtually all political affiliations. What I discovered was that Talossans really ARE middle of the road! So imagine my surprise as I tried to steer Ben's ship of state down that road, only to find him persistently pulling the ship to the xenophobic right. It wasn't consistent with people's wishes, nor was it consistent with what I had been asked to do! And that situation became intolerable.

continued on next page

Dan Wardlow Speaks (continued)

You know, Ben has tried to cast my disagreement with him as having to do entirely with the peace treaty I negotiated with the Free Commonwealth of Penguinia. My disagreement with him had nothing to do with that. That was a smokescreen. I had dared to confront Ben with his own internal inconsistencies about Talossan democracy, and that was a big no-no.

SC: Think back, if you can, to the original Exodus from Talossa of September 1997. What were your thoughts about the state of Talossa and the claims of the Exodees at that time? How have your experiences in government and at the sharp end of Madisonian tactics changed your view of those events?

DW: I had never had negative experiences with Evan, Ryan, or Miestrâ, the principal actors in the exodus. To the contrary, I'd found them in my limited contacts to be rational human beings and

generally nice guys. At the time, I thought "hmmm ... this looks like a histrionic set-up on Ben's part." Now I realize that Evan had pushed many of the same buttons on Ben which I have just pushed. I think Ben is xenophobic and vindictive, and Penguinia is the result.

SC: Does Talossa have a future? What changes do you think would be necessary to ensure that future?

DW: Yes, Talossa has a future in the sense that Albania had a future back in the 1960s. It has a petty dictator who pays lip service to democratic institutions and processes. You know, Albanian leader Enver Hoxha was often pictured encouraging the bountiful harvest by singing Albanian folk songs with the peasants in the fields. At the same time, Radio Tirana heaped virulent xenophobia and warped perspectives on the remainder of the world. And if you know anything about Talossan history, you know that Enver Hoxha was Ben's

role model in forming his kingdom back in the early 1980s. So that's my view of a Talossan future: happy peasants toiling in the cultural fields, singing Talossan folksongs under the intrusive watch of their maximum leader. If that's what you're into as a micronationalist, more power to you for becoming a Talossan citizen. But don't be deceived and join because you believe you can make any difference to politics or the course of the nation. As Jim Morrison might say "You cannot petition the lord with prayer."

SC: Does Dan Wardlow have a micronational future?

DW: Well, right now, I don't think he does have a future in micronations. I'm taking a nice time out and enjoying many other pursuits. San Francisco is an exciting place to live in the "real world!" And it's infinitely more fun than imaginary Talossa. And my husband is happy to have me back in the real world, too!■

Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom (continued)

citizens or prospectives, half of which rarely post on Wittenberg nowadays.

While men usually appreciate the company of women regardless of the Gender ratio, women are usually uncomfortable on a forum composed of almost exclusively an all male crowd, especially with the subject matters focus on male subjects.

Women also tend to interact differently, and in an all male crowd monopolizing the debates, might find it hard to find their niche.

But this is not limited to the ladies. Every person is interested in Talossa for different reasons. Once we have our constitution in place, and our various legislative bodies

elected, we should really try to see how we can open Talossa to various experiences. How we can help the creation of clubs or associations that could evolve in Talossa on the sideline, but still interact with the whole society.

The Science-Fiction and Whiskey club was a good idea. It would be easy to found such exclusive clubs on any subject, that some citizens could join and that has it's own activities, but still publishes a newsletter that anyone could subscribe to.

The idea is not to divide the county into various cliques, but rather to help people with common interest interact closer together, while still offering their findings to the

general public.

Maybe such clubs could be entitled to have their own Wittenberg forum, which any citizens (or Friend) could visit and post into, even if they are not a member of the club.

I realize these ideas are contrary to past beliefs regarding forums in Talossa, which proposed the use of a single forum, to prevent "splinter groups". But as we have seen with the Constitutional Convention and the Mitchell Building, additional forums in Wittenberg can improve communications in specific subjects, while still allowing a single search applet for all forums, a single login, and universal access for all citizens.■

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